

## Stranger Sides - Part One by orphan\_account

**Series:** [Stranger Sides the Series \[1\]](#)

**Category:** Sanders Sides, Stranger Things (TV 2016), Thomas Sanders, Video Blogging RPF

**Genre:** Gen

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Logan Sanders/Logic, Patton Sanders/Morality, Roman Sanders/Creativity, Shae Sanders, Thomas Sanders (Video Blogging RPF), Virgil Sanders/Anxiety, lotsa ocs - Character

**Relationships:** Only platonic for now

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**Summary:**

In Colfax, Florida, there's a secret underneath the image of a small town. After Patton Sanchez goes missing, a strange boy appears. With Patton gone, Thomas, Roman, and Logan must figure out what to do with this boy. They must also find out what happened to Patton and where he went. This strange kid - Anxiety-01 - has a connection to where Patton was taken. Now if only they could figure out how.

AKA the crossover between Sanders Sides and Stranger Things nobody asked for.

# 1. With Escapes and Demogorgons

## Author's Note:

Expect there to be a lot of warnings for the later chapters.

So I decided to do this because of reasons, and because why not. Not really sure where I'm going with it. I am cutting some stuff out that was on the show, simply for my sanity. Considering that the episodes of Stranger Things are super long, there are going to be multiple chapters per episode, so prepare for that. Anywho, if that's all, this is Stranger Sides! Enjoy!

## ***November 6th, 20XX***

*Subject AX-01-VI seems to be calm for now. After the most recent test in the sensory deprivation tank, he had another episode. Breathing levels are back to normal. Heart rate has returned to a normal level for now. He is still jumpy, as per usual, so we're keeping an eye on him. However, we think it's safe to return him to his room.*

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The boy sat on his bed, legs crossed. He gently tapped four times on his leg, then seven, then eight. Most people didn't really understand what it was for and the boy didn't either - not really. All he knew was that the Man taught him this and that it helped to calm him.

The boy gazed around his room briefly before letting his eyes slide shut. Keeping them open wouldn't do much good.

*A man running through darkened hallways, gasping for breath. The lights flickering rapidly A figure - a monster chasing after the man.*

The boy's breathing quickened, but he didn't pull himself out. This could be his chance. He just had to do it correctly.

*The man using the elevator instead of taking the stairs. The man looked around fervently. Its growling and clicking were getting closer.*

The boy didn't have time to wonder why he knew the words that came into his head. He had to stay focused.

*The elevator dinging and the man rushing on. The man pressing the button for it to go up. He's looking out into the hallway. The lights are flickering even more.*

The boy took in a shuddering breath. He knew what was coming. He didn't want to see. He didn't want to look. But he had to. This was his chance.

*The man looking at the ceiling of the elevator. There's the monster. A scream echoing in the boy's head.*

The boy jolted forward just as alarms start blaring. He was panting. He knew he was scared. He blinked back the tears trying to escape. He supported himself on the bed as he recovered from the episode.

The boy slowly untangles his legs and climbs out of the bed. He only had a short amount of time to get out. He came up with a plan as he broke himself out using his powers.

The boy set his plan in motion.

Anxiety had left the building.

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"Something's coming - something out for blood," Thomas said, voice quiet. "A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness. *It is almost here.*" Thomas looked at his friends menacingly. Roman itched his nose, Patton seemed almost scared, and Logan was most likely coming up with the best solution to the problem.

"What is it?" Patton asked, voice wavering.

"What if it's the Demogorgon?" Roman said. "We're so screwed if it's the Demogorgon."

"The statistics of it being the Demogorgon are particularly low," Logan sighed.

"So it's still possible," Roman said, raising an eyebrow. Patton bit his lip, waiting for Thomas to continue.

"An army of troglodytes charge into the chamber!" Thomas exclaimed, slamming down the troglodyte pieces. He still wasn't sure how Roman had gotten his hands on them.

"Like I said, it was unlikely that the Demogorgon would show up," Logan said, adjusting his glasses. Roman and Patton let out relieved chuckles. Thomas smiled before letting the expression go back to a more neutral one.

Thomas let the silence reign for a few minutes before continuing in a soft voice. "Wait a minute. Do you hear that? That sound? That boom. Boom. *Boom!*" Thomas slammed his hands down on the table. The other three boys jumped at the unexpected noise.

"That didn't come from the troglodytes. No, that- It came from something else," Thomas' voice was quieter again. He grabbed a piece in his hand, then slammed it down on the table. "The Demogorgon!"

Patton and Roman groaned while Logan tried to think of the best course of action.

"This can't go well!" Roman exclaimed.

"Patton, your action," Thomas said.

"I don't know!" Patton said.

"Use fireball!" Roman shouted.

"That would take rolling a thirteen or higher!" Patton replied, stressed out.

"It would be more logical to cast a protection spell," Logan said, irritated.

“Oh, hush, calculator watch! Use fireball, Patton!” Roman said.

“Cast protection!” Logan protested.

Thomas slammed the table again. “The Demogorgon has grown tired of your senseless human bickering! It stomps towards you. Boom!”

“Fireball him!”

“Another stomp, boom!”

“Cast protection, Patton!”

“He roars in anger!”

“Fireball!”

“Use protection! It’s the best option here!”

Patton picked up the die. He quickly threw it as he shouted, “Fireball!”

The die skidded across the table and fell to the floor. The four quickly scrambled to find it.

“Crap!” Roman.

“Where’d they go?!” Thomas.

“Where is it?” Patton.

“I don’t know!” Logan.

“Did it roll a thirteen?” Roman.

“Do you think I know?!” Logan again.

“Where is it?!” Thomas.

Roman started pacing. “Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.”

“Thomas!” A voice from upstairs - probably Thomas’ mother.

“Did you find it yet?” Patton asked.

“No! I haven’t!” Thomas said as the door to the basement opened.

“Thomas!” His mother, Lilia, looked down the stairs. Thomas looked up.

“Mom, we’re in the middle of something,” Thomas said.

“I don’t care. Fifteen after,” Lilia said, tapping her wrist. Thomas sighed, and pulled himself to his feet. He clambered up the stairs, leaving the other three to worry about finding the die.

“Mom, just twenty more minutes,” Thomas pleaded, walking into the kitchen.

“It’s a school night, Thomas,” Lilia said, putting leftovers from dinner away. “I just put Shae to bed. You can finish next weekend.”

“But that’ll ruin the atmosphere!”

“Thomas-”

“Mom, the campaign took two whole weeks to plan! How could I have known it would take ten hours?”

“Ten hours?!”

Thomas licked his lips before turning to his dad, who was watching TV in the living room. “Dad, don’t you think twenty more min-”

“I think you should listen to your mother,” his father, Kenneth, said, not really paying attention.

Thomas let out a groan as he made his way back to the basement. He heard Patton ask a question and Roman reply with a sassy tone of voice. Thomas let out a sigh as he watched his friends come out of the basement.

“There’s some leftover pizza,” Patton said. “What should we do with it?”

"I'll go offer it to Leilani, see if she wants it," Roman said with a grin on his face. He took the pizza box from Patton. Thomas rolled his eyes, but let Roman go about his mission. He looked over to Logan, who sighed in exasperation.

"He *does* know that she's not interested in any of his advances, correct?" Logan said.

"Aw, Logan, don't say that. Roman just wants to try out his interests!" Patton exclaimed.

"We're only in middle school though. We have time to... experiment," Thomas said.

"Nice," Logan complimented.

"Thanks," Thomas replied. The three walked to the side door, then stepped out onto the driveway. Thomas let Logan and Patton get their bikes. A few moments later, Roman walked out, eating the slice of pizza himself. He had a slightly dejected expression on his face, but he wiped it away quickly.

"Something is wrong with your sister," Roman said, quickly shoving the last bite of pizza in his mouth.

"What are you talking about?"

"She's got a stick up her butt."

Patton laughed while Logan snorted. Thomas wasn't very amused though. "I don't see what you mean."

"Might have something to do with that douchebag she's dating," Roman continued. "What's his name? Miguel Rodgers?"

"She's turning into a jerk," Logan said bluntly, pedaling his bike up to the dimly lit, empty road. "I'm not sure how you can stand living with her."

"She's *always* been a jerk," Thomas said. "I've just gotten used to it by this point!"

“Nah, she used to be cool,” Roman replied, getting on his bike. “Remember that one time she dressed up as an elf for our Elder tree campaign? And that’s a rhetorical question, Pocket Protector.”

“That was four years ago!” Thomas shouted after Roman, who was already halfway down the street.

“Goodbye Thomas. See you tomorrow,” Logan said, following Roman.

Patton hesitated. “It was a seven.”

“What?” Thomas said, turning to Patton.

“I rolled a seven,” Patton elaborated. “The Demogorgon got me. I guess you could say I was captured by its magic spell. Or my lack of one.” A small smile lifted onto Thomas’ face, and Patton smiled back.

“Yeah, okay,” Thomas said. “See you tomorrow, Patton.”

Patton picked up his bike’s brake and nodded. “Later, ‘gater.”

Thomas watched as Patton rode away. The smile on his face dropped. Then the lights flickered and went out before coming back on. It was strange, but Thomas didn’t think anything of it. He just turned the lights actually off and went back inside.

If only he were a little more observant, he would have heard the quiet clicking.



## 2. Missing Sons and Missing Anxieties

### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter warnings: Use of the bad f-word, minor violence, bullying, minor anxiety

“Where the hell are they?” Callie said. “Kai?”

Kai looked up from the eggs he was cooking. “Check the couch!”

“I did!” Callie, his mother, called back. She looked under the pillows and rifled underneath and between the cushions. “Oh, here they are.” Callie walked into the kitchen, picking up her purse. “Alright, sweetie. I’ll see you tonight.” She gave a small pat on Kai’s shoulder.

“Yeah, see you later,” Kai replied.

“Where’s Patton?” Callie asked.

“Oh, I haven’t gotten him up yet,” Kai said, scraping the eggs onto two plates. “He’s probably still sleeping.

“Kai, you have to get him up!”

“Mom, I’ve been busy making breakfast.”

“I’ve told you a thousand times,” Callie sighed, walking out of the kitchen and down the hall. She stopped at Patton’s bedroom door and knocked. “Patton, c’mon kiddo.” She opened the door. “It’s time to get out of bed!”

She was about to continue before seeing that Patton wasn’t there. There wasn’t water running in the bathroom, so he couldn’t be showering. One glance at the door revealed that it was left open, so he wasn’t even using the toilet.

Callie left Patton’s room and walked back down the hallway to the kitchen. “He came back home last night, right?”

“He’s not in his room?” Kai asked, putting the plates on the table.

"Did he come home or not?" Callie repeated.

"I... don't know," Kai replied.

"You don't know?" Callie asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No. I-I got home late. I was working."

"You were working?!"

"Eric asked if I could cover and I agreed. I just thought we could use the extra money."

"Kai, we've talked about this!"

"I know, I know."

"You can't take shifts when I'm working!"

"It's not a big deal! He was at the Sanders' house all day yesterday. He probably just spent the night," Kai said.

Callie let out an aggravated sigh. "I can't believe you. I just can't believe you sometimes!"

Kai watched as his mother walked over to the home phone and dialed up the Sanders household. Callie listened to the rings. It was picked up on the third.

"Hello?" Lilia's voice filtered through.

"Hey Lilia, it's Callie," Callie said.

"Oh, Callie. Hi," Lilia said. Callie heard some yelling from two kids in the background. One of them sounded like Patton. Lilia reprimanded them before apologizing.

"W-was that Pat I heard back there?" Callie asked.

"Patton? No, that was Thomas," Lilia replied.

"Patton didn't spend the night?" Callie asked. A pit of dread formed in her stomach as she looked over at Kai. Something didn't feel right.

"No, he left a little after eight, why?" Lilia continued. "Is he not home?"

"Actually, I think he just left early for school," Callie said, trying to hide the rising panic in her voice. "Thank you so much, bye."

"Bye," Lilia said before Callie hung up.

Callie and Kai looked at each other for a few moments. Kai shifted nervously, his heart pounding in his chest. Patton was missing. What were they going to do?

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Thomas locked up his bike as the first bell rang. He glanced around, looking for Patton. Thing was, he was nowhere to be found.

"That's weird," Thomas said, starting to walk towards the school building. "I don't see him."

"I'm telling you, his mom is right," Logan said, walking after Thomas. "He probably just went to class early."

"Yeah, he's always paranoid Gursky is gonna give him another pop quiz," Roman chuckled, running to catch up to the other two.

"Step right up, ladies and gentlemen," a voice from behind them said. They turned and it was revealed to be Kaleb Anderson and his sidekick, Joshua Pitsfield. "Step up and get your tickets for the freak show."

"Who do you think would make more money in a freak show?" Kaleb asked, getting in the boys' faces. "Emotionless, Lover Boy, or Princy?"

Joshua looked at the three of them, pretending to be deep in thought. When he spoke, he imitated Roman's overly dramatic fanfare. "I'd go with Princy."

"I've told you a million times, it's an act of self-expression," Roman said, annoyed.

"I've told you a million times," Joshua said, still mimicking Roman.

Kaleb chuckled before nodding to Roman.

“Do the chest thing,” Kaleb said.

“No way!” Roman exclaimed. “It hurts to do that, you know.”

“I don’t give a shit!” Kaleb said. “Now do it, or you’ll regret it.”

“You don’t scare me,” Roman said, stepping up to Kaleb and Joshua.

“Are you really daring to challenge us?” Joshua said, voice slightly dangerous.

“Why, yes, I am. For what is an adventure without a little challenge?” Roman said, smirking.

“Why you little-” Kaleb started, raising a fist. A hand wrapped around his wrist and he looked over his shoulder.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” a voice said. It was Kai.

“Yeah, well, I didn’t want to hang around here anymore anyway,” Kaleb said, yanking his hand from Kai’s grip. “Let’s beat it.”

Joshua and Kaleb then left, much to Thomas, Roman, and Logan’s relief. The three then turned to Kai, who gave them a small smile.

“Hey, what’s up?”

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Karter let out a breath as he parked his car. He pulled a chocolate bar out of his glove compartment and unwrapped it to the halfway point. He put it in his mouth and turned off the car. He opened the door, then pushed himself out, being careful not to fall.

As he entered the police station, Karter snapped off the part of the candy bar that was in his mouth. As he past the secretary’s desk, he heard a sigh.

“So nice of you to show up,” Sasha said sarcastically.

“Good morning Sash!” Karter exclaimed cheerfully. “Morning

everybody!”

“G’mornin’ chief,” Officer Johnson said.

“Damn, chief. You look like somebody ran you over with a truck - twice,” Lieutenant Morris said.

“Really?” Karter asked.

“Yup,” Morris chuckled.

“Looked better than your husband when I left him this morning,” Karter replied, making himself a coffee. Morris - Ethan was his first name - and Johnson - or Peter - both laughed at Karter’s statement.

“Well, while you were drinking or sleeping or doing whatever it is you deemed to be so important in the mornings, Phil Larson called,” Sasha said, walking over and setting some stuff down on the empty desk in the office. She took the candy bar from his mouth. “Said some kids are stealing his gnomes again.”

“Ah, the garden gnomes again,” Karter said, getting a chocolate-chocolate frosted donut. He finished making his coffee, going with the usual chocolate abomination. He started walking to his office. “I’ll get right on that.”

“On a more pressing matter, Callie Sanchez couldn’t find her son this morning,” Sasha said as Karter stopped to rearrange Johnson’s cards.

“Ah, I’m gonna get on that,” Karter said, muffled by the donut now in his mouth. He pulled it out and continued his journey to his office. “Just give me a minute.”

“C-Callie is very upset!” Sasha pressed. “She-”

“Sash, Sasha, we’ve discussed this,” Karter said. “Mornings are for coffee, contemplation, and chocolate.”

“Chief, she’s already in your office,” Sasha sighed, resting her face in a hand in an almost facepalm.

“Then I’ll deal with her when I get there.”

Sasha heaved a sigh and Karter couldn't stop the smirk that rose onto his face. Karter stepped into his office and looked at the woman sitting in the chair. She almost immediately noticed him and stood.

"Good morning, Callie," Karter said, closing his office door behind him. "Heard about your problem, everything okay?"

"No, obviously not!" Callie exclaimed as Karter walked around his desk and sat in his chair. "I've been waiting for over an hour, Baker. My youngest son, Patton, has gone missing. I can't find him anywhere. He's didn't spend the night at a friend's house. Kai called me and let me know he wasn't at school. We don't even know if he came home last night."

"Well, I apologize," Karter said, starting the file for a missing person.

"I'm losing my mind here!" Callie said, pacing around the office.

"How old is he again?" Karter asked.

"Thirteen," Callie replied.

"He's probably just playing hooky. He is that age," Karter reasoned.

"No, not Pat. He's not like that. I *know* he's not like that."

"How are you sure though? You can never really tell these days."

"He's not like most kids. He's not like you, he's not like me. He's hardly even like Kai!" Callie said. "He has a few friends, but some of the kids bully him. They make fun of him and call him names. They laugh at him, his clothes-"

"Clothes? What's wrong with his clothes?" Karter asked.

"I don't know!" Callie said, exhausted and done with everything. "Look, he's a sensitive kid. He's more susceptible to emotion than most. Ishmael used to say he was a queer - called him a fag."

"Is he?"

"He's missing is what he is!" Callie pushed her hand through her hair.

“When was the last time you heard from Ishmael?” Karter asked, leaning back in his chair.

Callie let out a deep breath as she sat down. “Last I heard he was in Virginia. That was around a year ago, but he has nothing to do with this.”

“Why don’t you give me his number?” Karter said, getting a pen and some sticky notes.

“Baker, he has nothing to do with this. Trust me.”

“Callie, 99 out of 100 times when a kid goes missing, they’re with another parent or relative,” Karter said calmly.

“What about the one other time?” Callie asked.

“Callie, this is Colfax. It’s extremely unlikely that anything or anyone has taken your son,” Karter said. “The worst thing that’s happened here in the four years that I’ve been working was old man Gibson having a heart attack. He recovered from that - it was from all the fried foods he was eating. Was *not* good for his health.”

Callie sighed before conceding. “Okay. I will talk to Ishmael. He’ll talk to me before talking to a cop.” Callie leaned forward, resting her arms on the desk. Tears had gathered in her eyes. “Just, please. Find my son, Karter.”

“Please find him,” her voice cracked and wavered.

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The boy had run until the dark became light. He had stumbled upon an abandoned mechanical thing - ‘ *bike* ’ something in his head supplied - at some point during the dark. Now he was huddled in a hollow tree. It was too light to go out now. He could get caught.

The boy had kept himself up until the bright orb was high in the sky. He didn’t dare let himself fall into slumber until he was well away from danger. Now trusting he was safe, he let his eyes fall shut and his head fell to rest on the inside of the tree.

*A man stepped out of a car. He had a suitcase in one hand and shook the hand of another man - the Man - with the other.*

*"Doctor Lennor," the first man said. Lennor was the Man.*

*"Mister Bricanni," Lennor said. "Right this way."*

*Suddenly, they were walking through the halls. Their pace was fast. They needed to be somewhere.*

*"The entire east wing will be evacuated within the hour," another one of the men was saying. "We've sealed off the entire area following quarantine procedure."*

*The entire group of men got dressed in the quarantine gear, ready to go into the depths of the lab. It took them a bit longer than wanted, but safety first and all that. They even had guns in case something jumped out of the rift to attack them.*

*Soon enough, they were in the bottom level of the lab. The lights were flickering at a steady pace, not nearly as bad as the night before.*

*The group made their way down the hallway. The air was full of tiny white particles. Soon they reached the rift.*

*"This is where it came from?" Bricanni asked.*

*"Yes," the unnamed man from before said.*

*"And the boy?" Bricanni continued.*

*"He can't have gone far," Lennor said.*

*The boy jolted awake, panic settling in his gut. It was stupid to stop. He needed to keep going. If he was going to stay alive, he needed to find help. He needed food, water, shelter, a good starting point.*

*The boy climbed out of the hollow trunk. Down the hill he was on was a small building with neon lights. A picture of a kitchen and some food flashed in his head. That was where he needed to go.*



### 3. Anxiety and Morality- Oh Yeah, and Then Those Others

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings: Mention/signs of anxiety, swearing. If there are any more, please let me know!

The boy silently closed the door behind him. He entered into a dark, closet-like area. Sounds - people talking, clattering of metal on porcelain, music - came from a lighter area just down the hall. The smell coming from over there was intoxicating. He hadn't eaten a full meal in several cycles at this point.

The boy peeked around the corner. A man was bustling around the lighter area - *a kitchen* . He grabbed a couple of trays and went out into a separate space with a bunch of seating arrangements.

"Alright, here you go," the man said.

"Hey, Joe," another man said. This one was sitting down. "What do you think about that, uh, bet offer?"

"I dunno man. I just don't know," the first man, presumably Joe, said.

"37 points per game average. You know you want to," the sitting man said. He reminded the boy too much of people from the Bad Place. The boy just kept going, keeping as silent as he could - it was a practiced skill by this point.

"Thirty-seven now, yeah."

"Mister Basket..." The voices faded out as the boy entered the kitchen. There were plenty of dirty dishes, many sitting in a sink. On one of the counters was something that smelled really good.

The boy approached the small basket full of a potato-like food - *french fries* - with caution. He didn't know if he could trust it. Even still, he picked one up and took a small bite out of it. His eyes widened, blown away by the taste. As he stuffed his face with the

food, he forgot to keep an eye on the man - Joe.

A shout startled the boy from his small haven. His head shot up and he saw the man looking right at him. The boy quickly picked up the basket, which still had a small bit of food in it, and bolted. He ignored the following shouts.

The boy had almost made it to the door he entered from when a pair of hands landed on his shoulders. He was spun turned around, making him drop the food. He tried his best to ignore his heaving chest, wild heartbeat and shaking limbs.

“You think you can steal from me, kid?!” Joe asked roughly. Joe took in the dirt smeared on the boy’s face, the dark, buzz cut hair, the pale complexion, the bags under his eyes. Joe’s eyes widened in surprise. “What the hell?”

The boy could only stare as he continued to shake in fear and anxiety - just like his branding.

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Logan eagerly stood next to Mister Kallis’ desk. “Has it arrived yet?”

“Sorry, Logan,” Kallis said. “I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news but...” Logan’s face fell a bit, but he tried to not let it show. “It came!”

Logan’s eyes immediately lit up again. Thomas couldn’t help the fond chuckled that escaped his lips. He knew Roman was trying to hide a smile but was failing miserably - not that Logan would notice.

Mister Kallis led the three boys to one of the old clubrooms - one of the ones no longer in use. Sitting on a table in the middle of the room was an old-timey radio. Logan immediately ran up to the table.

“An actual Heathkit ham shack!” He was all over it in a second. This was one of the few instances that he openly displayed his emotion - the others of the group still hated his mother.

If asked later, Roman and Thomas would swear that Logan was teleporting from place to place around the table.

"She's a beauty," Mister Kallis said. "Are you sure you don't mind that it's an older model?"

"Not at all!" Logan said, waving off the teacher's concerns. "If anything, it makes it even better. We get to learn about the past and the past's technology. Maybe I could even teach Roman about the evolution of technology and sound production."

"Why would I want to learn about that?" Roman asked, almost sounding offended.

"It might help your future pursuits in musical theater," Logan said. "You never know if you will get cast or not."

Thomas let the two get into their senseless bickering and turned to Kallis with a smile. "Thank you, Mr. Kallis. This is a really rare opportunity for Logan. He's never really been able to get something as big as this, considering he lives alone with his dad who can't always afford things."

"Anything to help one of my students," Kallis replied, grinning. "Say, what do you think Patton will think when he gets back?"

"He'll probably just be happy that Logan is happy," Thomas said. "He's like that sometimes. Well, most of the time."

Thomas turned back to Logan and Roman. Logan was now showing Roman how it worked and giving him a summarized full-course lesson on how the machine worked. Roman seemed ecstatic about the fact that he could contact people all the way in Australia.

Thomas couldn't help but wonder how these boys had found their way into his heart. That included Patton too, even if he wasn't here.

Thomas was about to go over and help but there was a knock on the door. A man - the vice principal - opened the door.

"May I borrow Thomas, Roman, and Logan?"

It didn't take long for them to arrive at the principal's office. The three were situated on the couch. Logan was on the left, Roman was on the right, and Thomas was in the middle. All three were silent.

“Good afternoon, boys,” Chief Baker said, entering the room. “How has your day been?” Logan hummed, Thomas shrugged, and Roman gave a thumbs up. “Well don’t just jump at me all at once.”

Thomas shifted uncomfortably. “Are we in trouble?”

“No, you’re fine,” Karter said. “I just wanted to ask about Patton Sanchez. I have an understanding that the four of you were close friends. Maybe more than friends?”

Roman choked on his spit, Thomas’ face went beet red, and Logan kept a straight face, save for the light pink that spread on his cheeks.

“No, sir,” Logan corrected. “We were just friends. We’ve known each other since kindergarten, is all.”

“Ah, I see,” Karter said. He didn’t let the awkward silence reign for long. “Moving right along, you three are close to Patton. My understanding is that he went missing sometime between 8 PM last night and 7 AM this morning. You three are going to tell me what you know, starting with you in the middle.”

“Normally, he takes Pine Street to leave my house,” Thomas said. “From there he goes Woodland Lane, past the old electricity tower.”

“Woodland Lane?” Karter asked. He turned to Morris. “You ever heard of that street?”

“No,” Morris said. “Sounds a little bit made up to me.”

“The street is a real street, but it’s an unnamed one,” Thomas said, clearing up the confusion. “Roman decided to start calling it Woodland Lane because it has forest on both sides of it. Also because it reminds him of *Into the Woods*. Like I said, he passes the old electricity tower - the really old one - on his way home.”

“We could show you if you want,” Roman said, the tone of his voice almost pleading.

“No need,” Karter said. “I know where it is.”

“But we can help look!” Roman exclaimed. Thomas put a hand on his

knee, keeping him from standing. Thomas *did* , however, rub his thumb in a circular manner across Roman's kneecap.

"No," Baker said, heaving a sigh.

"But statistically speaking, if you had people who knew the area well, you might be able to find clues faster," Logan said.

"I said no!" Karter repeated, voice rising in volume to an almost shout. He sighed again and leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "After school, you are to go home immediately. No biking around looking for your friend. This isn't some Disney movie where everyone gets a happy end."

Roman looked down at his hands. He opened his mouth to speak but Karter beat him to it.

"Do I make myself clear?"

Logan was the first to speak. "Yes, sir."

Roman and Thomas begrudgingly agreed a moment later after Logan fixed them with one of his looks.

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*A woman walked up to a place that the boy - Anxiety - was not familiar with. It was a little shack made of sticks, but it was well-made. The woman pressed a button that was poorly attached to a stick.*

*"Ring-a-ding-ding!" The woman was smiling, but the boy knew that something was wrong. Not with the vision, but with the woman in the present - outside of the vision. "Anyone home?"*

*A boy's cheerful voice came from inside the little hut. "Password?"*

*"Um, is it... Mor- Moral-" The woman was obviously faking not knowing the password. "Morality?"*

*"Yup! You may enter fair maiden!"*

*The woman chuckled as she pushed the blanket aside and entered the*

small space. *"Is your princely friend rubbing off on you?"*

*"A little bit, I think," the boy inside the hut said. He had a bright smile on his face, though Anxiety could tell it was a little forced.*

*"So guess what, Patton?" The woman walked over and sat on the little bed in the shack. "I got off of work early and guess what I got tickets to see?"*

*"What?" Patton said, excited.*

*"Ta-da! A Dog's Purpose!"*

*"I thought they were sold out!" Patton said.*

*"I pulled a few strings. What's the point in being friends with the movie theater manager if you never use it?" The woman grinned, ruffling Patton's hair. "I know it's not about cats, but I think dogs will suffice?"*

*"It'll do much more than that! Thank you mom!" Patton threw his arms around the woman - his mother. "Thank you, thank you thank you."*

The boy jolted awake, a name forming on his lips.

"Patton."

*"Thomas? Roman? Logan?! Mom! Kai! Somebody! Help me!" The pleas devolved into sobs. "Please... Help me..."*

The boy wished he could. His heart ached and his hands trembled. Patton, a kid who was scared and in a place he didn't know, was calling out. Anxiety was the only one who could hear him, and he couldn't do anything to help.

The man from before - Joe - entered the dimly lit room. He was carrying a plate that had a sandwich-like object on it. He looked over after closing the door and saw that the boy was staring at him.

"Looks like you're finally awake," Joe said. "I cleaned the dirt off of your face and dressed you in some actual clothes. I hope you don't mind." He walked over as the boy shifted into a sitting position. "Careful, don't push yourself. I made you a hamburger."

“Ham... burger?” The boy didn’t know what it was. It smelled good though. Joe offered him the plate and he took the food off of it.

The boy took a cautious sniff before biting the sandwich. He immediately started to eat it several bites at a time.

“Slow down a bit,” Joe said, sitting in a chair next to the bed. “Did your parents forget to feed you?”

The boy hummed, tone neutral.

“Is that why you ran away?” Joe asked gently. The boy shrugged.

“Bad people,” he said softly, then continued to eat.

“Did they hurt you?”

“Hurt?”

“Cause pain or discomfort,” Joe said. The boy hummed again, more affirmative this time than before. “Why did you have a hospital robe on?” The boy shot him a confused glance. “What you were wearing before. Did you go to a hospital?” The boy shrugged again. “Do you have a name?”

“AX-01-VI.”

“That sounds more like a serial code.”

The boy bit his lip after swallowing his mouthful of food. Did he trust this person enough to give him that information? Joe was feeding him, sheltering him, clothing him. The boy supposed he was in Joe’s debt. The only thing the boy could really do for now was answer his questions.

“AX is Anxiety,” he said, holding out his left arm. On it was a barcode, the word Anxiety, and the combination ‘AX-01-VI’. “01 means first Anxiety. VI is...” Anxiety looked for the words. “Unnecessary addition.”

Joe leaned back in his chair, arms crossed. “You’re a strange one. You obviously understand me - for the most part. And you don’t have

normal parents, do you?”

Anxiety shook his head gently. “Only bad people. Many.”

“How did you get here?”

“Ran.”

“Why did you choose my restaurant of all places?”

“Vision. Food. Survive.”

“Vision? What vision?” Joe asked. Anxiety held a hand out, then nodded to it. Joe carefully put his palm onto Anxiety’s. A moment later, they were in the void.

“Follow,” Anxiety said, taking Joe’s hand and leading him through the darkness. There was a soft sobbing sound. It slowly got louder and Anxiety pulled Joe along. Joe ignored how cold Anxiety must have been, considering he was just in a t-shirt and some shorts.

They ended up at a small little house. There was distant clicking and growling, but it didn’t seem to bother Anxiety - *ignore the fact that his palms were sweaty and his pulse was racing and he couldn’t breathe very well any more* - and the boy just waltzed into the building. Joe was pulled along.

“Patton?” Anxiety’s voice rang out in the almost silence. A whimper was his response. “I am... friend. Help.”

A young boy - a bit older than Anxiety - stuck his head out of a cabinet in the kitchen. Joe tried to ignore how he was covered in slime, how there was blood on his shirt, how there were vines everywhere.

“W-who are you?” The boy - Patton asked. He was definitely scared.

Anxiety let go of Joe’s hand and slowly approached Patton. He held his hand out. “Friend. Help.”

Patton, much like Joe had, carefully put his hand in Anxiety’s. Instantly, his head was filled with visions of people looking for him.



The police, his brother, his mom, his friends. The police had found his bike. His brother and mom were searching his normal hideouts. His friends were coming up a plan to help him. They were all worried about him.

Anxiety pulled Patton into a hug as Patton began to cry. Anxiety looked over to Joe. "You go. I stay. Protect Patton until..." Anxiety found himself looking for the right words again. "First contact."

Joe didn't understand what Anxiety meant. He didn't really even have time to ask as he was already fading away from the void.

"Don't call bad people!" That was the last thing he heard from Anxiety before he woke up back in the spare bedroom of his house. Anxiety was still on the bed, but his eyes were rolled into the back of his head.

Joe sighed and pushed a hand through his hair. What did he get himself into.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Yes, I know I changed up Eleven's powers when I gave them to Virgil. And I know you may think that this turn of events will change future occurrences. Probably, but don't worry! I think I'm a pretty good writer. I'll make it work. Until next Sunday!

## 4. Outbursts and Freakouts

“Hello?”

“Hi, is Ishmael there?” Callie asked into the phone.

“No, he’s not here right now,” the male voice continued.

“Who is this?”

“His boyfriend, Kevin,” he replied.

“Kevin, this is Callie, Ishmael’s ex-wife,” Callie said. “I’m calling on account of mine and his son, Patton, who went missing sometime last night. Can you please put Ishmael on?”

“Like I said, he’s not here right now,” Kevin sighed. “I can let him know you called.”

Callie bit her lip before looking to Kai. He was sitting in the living room, working on lost person posters for Patton. Callie’s heart clenched in her chest at the almost lost look on her eldest son’s face.

“N-no, I need to talk to him now,” Callie said. “Like, immediately.”

“I’ll let him know you called when he gets home, lady,” Kevin said.

Callie sighed. “Have him call me as soon as possible.”

“Will do,” Kevin said.

“Thank you, goodbye,” Callie said, then hung up. She took a deep breath before punching the wall. “Fuck!”

“Mom, stay calm,” Kai said softly. Callie chuckled humorlessly before dialing the other number she had written down. It dialed to the answering machine.

*“Hey, you’ve reached the voicemail of Ishmael Sorheita. Leave your message and I’ll get back to you soon.”*

"Hey, Ishmael, it's Callie," Callie said. "I know you'd rather not hear this, but I don't trust that guy - Kevin - to not forget. Patton has gone missing. I don't know where he is and nobody can find him. Just call me, okay? I know that."

She was cut off by the answering machine beeping. She slammed the phone onto the receiver. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!" She let out a loud sigh.

"M-mom?" Kai said, voice louder than it was a minute ago.

"What?" Her voice was a little harsher than intended, but she didn't care.

"Cops," Kai said, standing up. There was a knock on the door a moment later. Callie rushed over and opened it. Karter was standing there with Officer Johnson and Lieutenant Morris. Karter was holding a bike.

"We found Patton's bike," Karter said. "It was lying on the side of the road not too far from your house."

"Come in!" Callie said, backing away from the door. Her tone was impatient. Karter left the bike leaning against the wall next to the door and the three officers walked in. "It was just lying there?"

"Pretty much. Morris." Karter gestured to the kitchen. Morris nodded, then went to go look around a bit. Karter started going towards the back door. Callie, Kai, and Johnson followed.

"Did it have any blood on it?" Callie asked, concerned.

"No, no, no," Karter said. "Johnson."

"If you found the bike out there, why are you here?" Kai asked as Johnson went to inspect Patton's bedroom.

"He had a key to the house right?" Karter replied, glancing around the back room.

"Yea."

"So maybe he came home."

"You don't think I haven't checked my own house?!" Callie exclaimed.

"Didn't say anything like that," Karter said, brushing his hand along the washing machine. He noticed a dent in the wall next to it. "Has this always been here?"

"Maybe, I don't know. I have two boys," Callie said, sighing. "I'm pretty sure you could find an identical one in every room."

"You're not sure?" Karter said absent-mindedly. He opened the back door and realized that the doorknob was where the dent was. Outside, Lance, the Sanchez's dog, was barking. Karter saw that he was barking at the shed in the back.

Karter walked down the back steps and pet the dog. "Somethin' up with him?"

"No, I don't think so," Callie said, following and grabbing the dog's collar gently, but also firm. "Probably just hungry. C'mon Lance." She took the dog inside and Karter decided to check out the shed.

Karter opened the shed's door, then flicked on the light. On one of the tables was a pistol with its clip half-full of bullets left out. There were several bullets just laying in the open, then also a box of bullets. It was strange, but Karter didn't mess with it.

Instead, the sheriff continued his investigation. In one the corners, some of the wood was damaged. Karter gently ran his fingers over it. Then the lights flickered twice and went out, leaving Karter in almost complete darkness. He turned around and noticed some broken planks in another corner. They were just sitting on the floor in a meticulously placed pile. A jacket was sitting on the floor next to it. Karter could have sworn he saw something moving.

With fear in his gut, Karter grabbed a nearby flashlight and turned it on. He walked over to the pile as he heard a weird squelching noise. When he got over to the planks, he crouched down and directed the light at an opening. The squelching noise stopped suddenly. It was too quiet.

The lights came back on suddenly. Karter was still focused on the hole in the pile of planks. He slowly started standing up.

“Hey!”

“Oh, holy fuck!” Karter exclaimed, whipping around and clutching his chest. “Trying to give me a heart attack?!”

“Are you deaf or something? I’ve been calling you for the last five minutes,” Johnson said. Karter looked around, shining the flashlight in the darker corners. “What’s going on?”

Karter ignored his question and left the shed at a fast walking pace. Johnson followed after, extremely confused.

“Hello? Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Listen, I need you to call Sasha, get a search party together, alright?” Karter said, handing the flashlight to Johnson as Morris walked up. The three started walking across the yard to the back door. “Get all the volunteers you can find. Bring flashlights, too.”

“Do you think we got a problem here?” Morris asked. Karter simply looked at him before entering the house. His officer and lieutenant followed after him.

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“So he’s going over to your house?” Adlyn asked.

“Yup. Says he’s gonna help me ‘study’ but you know boys,” Leilani said. Her smile betrayed her words.

“Well have fun,” Adlyn said. “I’ll see you tomorrow at school.”

“Yeah, see ya,” Leilani replied before hanging up.

“Dinner!” Lilia called.

“Coming!” Thomas and Leilani shouted at the same time, though from their respective rooms.

Soon, everyone was sitting at the table. Lilia was cutting foot up for Shae and the other three were eating. Thomas bit his lip, one question on his mind. He was definitely nervous to ask it, but he really wanted to.

“Mom, shouldn’t we be out there looking for him?” Thomas asked.

“Thomas, we’ve been over this a million times; the chief said-”

“I don’t care what the chief said! Patton could be hurt! Maybe even in danger!” Thomas exclaimed, voice cracking with emotion.

“Well, that’s more reason to stay safe,” Lilia said. “If he’s in danger, then you can’t help him by getting yourself in danger, too.”

“But-!”

“End of discussion.”

It was awkwardly silent for a few moments. Then Leilani spoke up.

“So... is it okay if Miguel comes over to study?”

“No, it’s not,” Lilia said.

“What? Why not?” Leilani asked.

“Well, for one, you’re a girl teenager and he’s a boy teenager. That normally doesn’t go well,” Lilia started. “For another, Patton is missing. I wouldn’t feel right having a kid coming here and going back home in the middle of the night only to find him missing or dead the next day. God, it’s like I’m speaking Chinese in this house!”

“That’s bullshit!”

“Language,” Kenneth scolded. Thomas couldn’t help but think of every time Patton would scold them for swearing. Tears welled up in his eyes.

“So we’re under house arrest?” Leilani continued. “Just because Thomas’ stupid friend got lost on the way home from school?!”

“Wait, how is this Patton’s fault?!” Thomas exclaimed, anger joining the longing in his chest.

“Leilani, take that back,” Lilia said.

“No!”

“Don’t you dare blame Patton for this!” Thomas shouted, standing from his chair abruptly. The tears threatened to fall. “This isn’t his fault! It’s not his fault he went missing or got kidnapped or whatever the hell happened to him! I think you need to pull that stick out of your ass and see the full picture!”

Thomas was panting, the tears fully flowing but he couldn’t care less. His heart pounded in his chest. “At least you can still hang out with Miguel at school. I can’t even get that because Patton is gone.”

“You still have Logan and Roman,” Leilani sneered.

“But Patton is the glue that keeps us together!” Thomas exclaimed, now expressing his emotions with his hands. “Patton is the one who teaches Logan it’s okay to feel emotions! Patton is the one who comforts Roman when he’s bullied about having two dads and being gay himself! Patton is the only one I can tell my deepest, darkest secrets to because no one else would *understand* .”

Thomas' voice broke as he lowered it to a whisper. He bit his lip hard, holding back his sobs. He looked around the table and saw all eyes on him. His dad had his mouth open in shock and his mother wasn’t much better. Shae didn’t really understand what had just happened, but he *did* know that Thomas was upset. Leilani looked extremely surprised and there was a small bit of guilt and regret there too.

“Thomas, I-”

“Leilani, apologize to your brother!” Lilia said.

“No, it’s okay mom,” Thomas sniffed, wiping the tears away. He scooted his chair in after stepping out of the way. “Thank you for dinner, but I’m not feeling very hungry anymore. I’m gonna go to bed. Goodnight.”

With that Thomas quietly went upstairs and to his room. Instead of getting ready to sleep, however, he pulled his jacket on and grabbed his backpack. He rearranged his blankets and pillows to make it look like he was in bed. He turned the light off, then opened the window and climbed onto the roof. He slid the window closed and turned to his left to come face-to-face with Miguel.

“Look, I can explain-”

“Don’t care. Just use protection. We already have enough to deal with as it is,” Thomas sighed. He made his way down the wall and grabbed his bike. He climbed on and then sped off down the street. He had somewhere to be.

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Anxiety kept Patton close, never losing contact. He watched as a man entered the house - Karter - then leave almost immediately after checking out the back shed. If Anxiety could, he would relay what was happening in the real world to Patton, but he couldn’t form the words. He didn’t know how to comfort the extremely emotional boy.

Anxiety saw more than heard Callie and Kai - Patton’s mother and brother - talk with each other over old pictures. Some had a man with a face Anxiety couldn’t make out. Kai had started to break down before Anxiety saw his chance.

“Patton,” he said. Patton looked up, face and eyes red from the tears. “Come.”

Anxiety pulled him to the phone, then picked it up. He channeled his energy into the phone before handing it to Patton. He put his hand over Patton’s. Almost immediately, there was a response.

“Hello?”

“Mom? Is that you?” Patton’s voice was shaking violently.

“Patton! Where are you? Are you safe? Are you okay? Is somebody with you?”

“I-I’m in the house, except it’s not really the house,” Patton replied.



Tears rolled down his cheeks. "I'm only safe for a little while longer. I-I got hurt, but I had help wrapping it. A friend is with me." Patton looked to Anxiety for permission to reveal his name. Anxiety shook his head. "He doesn't want me to say his name, but I only have him with me for a while longer. He's running out of energy and he can't stay here. But mom, please know that I'm..." Patton's voice broke. "I'm still here. I'm not safe. I-I'm- I can't tell you where I am, but I'm here. Please, find me. I'm scared... Find me."

Anxiety took the phone from Patton and held it up to his ear while cradling the boy to his chest. "I am a friend. Cannot protect Patton anymore. Find him."

"I- I will," Callie said into the phone. She was openly sobbing. "I'll find him."

There were the clicking and growling of the Demogorgon near Anxiety and Patton. Patton clutched the shirt hanging off Anxiety's frame, ignoring the blood, and Anxiety's breath hitched.

"Find him." With that, Anxiety's strength ran out and the line dropped. He fell to his knees but didn't let Patton fall quite as quickly.

"Patton," Anxiety said, panting. "I have to go."

"What am I supposed to do?! You were the one keeping the monster away!"

Anxiety bit his lip. He pulled from his knowledge of things like this from the lab. "Hide. Go to hide spots. Stay until it goes away. No hide in same place twice. Stay close to house."

"Okay," Patton sobbed. "Okay. Just promise you'll be back. Promise you won't leave me forever."

Anxiety nodded. "Promise." He looked to the kitchen and saw a blade - knife. He concentrated and made it levitate into his hand. He gently placed it into Patton's, ignoring the shakiness of both their hands. "Protect self with this."

Anxiety withdrew from Patton's grasp, then led the boy to a hiding

place within the house. "Stay until it goes away."

Patton nodded, biting his lip to keep himself quiet. Anxiety gave him a small smile. "4, 7, 8."

"4, 7, 8," Patton replied quietly. Anxiety closed the chest. With the last few drops of his power, he pushed himself back to the waking world. His upper body flew forward with a gasp. Joe was setting some food - soup - on the bedside table when Anxiety woke up.

"Anxiety, are you okay? Is Patton safe?"

Anxiety nodded to both. He quickly got out of the bed, legs cramping from disuse and not drinking enough. Joe gasped at the blood on Anxiety's shirt. The cut - gash, really - was caused by the Demogorgon and had also made a hole in Anxiety's shirt.

"You need that cleaned and dressed!" Joe exclaimed.

"No time," Anxiety said. He ate two spoonfuls of the soup before rushing out of the bedroom. Joe followed.

"What's going on? Where are you going?"

"Patton's friends."

"Why?"

"They help more than me."

Anxiety took the jacket that Joe offered him, then pulled it on. He only shook his head when Joe asked if he could help. Then he was gone.

Joe was left standing on the porch, looking out at the rain.

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"Pat!" Roman shouted.

"Patton!" Thomas called into the dark forest.

"Patton, where are you?!" Logan shined his flashlight around.

"I got that comic that you won!" Roman said.

"I don't like this, you two," Logan said. "Something doesn't feel right."

"Logan, what's a little adventure without a challenge?" Roman asked.

"You always say that, but I'm serious this time," Logan said.

"You're always serious," Thomas said. "You wear neckties." That elicited a few chuckles from the other two boys. "What if Patton went missing because he ran into something? Something bad?"

"And we're going to the exact same spot he was last seen," Logan continued. "How was this a good idea again, Roman?"

"I never said it was a *good* idea," Roman said. "I just said it was the best option."

"Not to mention we don't have anything to protect ourselves with," Thomas said. "Does that seem smart to you?"

Logan was about to respond, but Roman held up a hand. "Hold on. Do you guys hear that?"

Just under the sound of the rain and thunder, there was some rustling - like someone walking. It got louder and there was a weird clicking. Logan, Roman, and Thomas turned around quickly, shining their lights into the darkness.

There was more rustling, again behind them. Roman was the first to turn around. His light landed on a boy wearing a too-big jacket that was black with gray stripes, a black and red - that was blood - t-shirt, and some ripped blue jeans. He was pale and had dark bags under his eyes. His dark hair was buzzcut.

Roman looked at Logan, then at Thomas, then to the boy again. His face was covered with fear and anxiety, but also a strange sort of confidence.

"Patton. Need help."

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Here's another chapter. Longer than the others, I think. Pretty emotionally taxing, too. Next one is a bit of a doozy. I might end up posting on Thursdays and Sundays in the next couple of weeks since this story isn't getting a whole lotta traffic. Hope you enjoyed it!

## 5. Anxiety in Trouble, Sanchez's Double Distress

### Notes for the Chapter:

Missed last week and I'm sorry about that. I'll be better next week.

**Chapter warnings** - mild gore and anxiety. Let me know if I missed anything else!

The three strangely familiar boys had taken Anxiety to a house. The four of them were soaked from the rain that was still pouring. Anxiety knew they would start questioning him as soon as they got inside. However, he didn't know if he could answer.

"How did you know Patton's name?"

"What happened to your hair? And your face?"

"Did you run away?"

"Are you in trouble or something?"

"Is that blood?!"

The one with green eyes and slightly longer hair reached out. The one with a star on his shirt smacked the first one's hand away.

"You're freaking him out!"

"*He's* freaking *me* out!"

"What if he's deaf?" The other one looked at Anxiety thoughtfully. Then he started using his hands to speak. Anxiety recognized it as ASL. The other spoke as he signed. "Hello. My name is Logan. That's Thomas-" He gestured to the boy with the star shirt. "-and the other one is Roman. Do you understand?"

Anxiety nodded.

"Can you hear us?" Logan said, not signing this time, and Anxiety nodded again. "Well, I can conclude he's not deaf."

“Enough,” Thomas sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “He’s probably scared and cold. Should I get you some new clothes?”

Anxiety looked down at what he was wearing. The stuff was a bit too big on his small frame, but the jacket felt safe - smelled familiar, like Joe’s house. “Shirt. Pants.”

Thomas nodded and went to go get some clothes. Anxiety jumped at the sudden loud thunderclap from outside. Logan raised an eyebrow and Roman looked a little surprised.

A moment later, Thomas came back with some gray sweatpants and another black t-shirt. Anxiety stood and shrugged off the jacket with some reluctance. Thomas handed him the clothes.

“These should be clean,” Thomas said as Anxiety took the clothes.

“Emphasis on *should*,” Roman and Logan muttered simultaneously.

Anxiety hissed softly in pain as he took his shirt off. He saw Thomas’ hands move to stop him from doing so, but Logan stopped Thomas.

After peeling the shirt off, Anxiety inspected his fresh wound, ignoring the older ones from the facility. It looked pretty bad - a deep gash, that was for sure. It was on his side at a slanted angle.

Anxiety’s attention was pulled from the wound by three gasps. He looked up and saw the other boys’ expressions. Roman’s was one of shock, Logan’s was in concern - though muted - and Thomas had a look of extreme worry.

“That looks like it hurts,” Roman said dumbly. Anxiety shrugged.

“How often did your parents feed you?” Thomas’ voice was laced with horror.

***Don’t be so surprised. They’ve hated you since they first laid eyes on you. You’re the reason they don’t have Patton. He should be here instead of you.***

“Do you need help with that wound?” Logan asked. Anxiety shook his head.

“Clean, sew, bandage. Alone,” Anxiety said simply.

“I’ll get you the stuff you need,” Thomas said. “Logan, show him to the bathroom so he can change into the pants.” Logan nodded, then held his hand out for Anxiety to take.

“Come with me,” Logan said softly, nodding to his hand. Anxiety was hesitant but decidedly took it. Logan led him off to a side door that was slightly open.

Logan pushed the door open further, then flicked the light switch on. Anxiety walked in and turned around. He looked Logan in the eye, then bit his lip.

“Stand outside?” Anxiety’s voice was soft.

“If it would help you feel more at ease, then yes,” Logan said, closing the door until there was only a small crack open.

Anxiety heard Thomas come back, then the three of them talking, but he decided to set to his task. He pulled the soaked pants he was wearing off, then shook water from his legs. After that, he put on the underwear and sweatpants Thomas had given him.

After making sure that the slightly loose pants were going to stay, Anxiety looked at himself in the mirror and cringed. Dirt and blood covered his face. His dark, buzzed hair was soaked and there were scratches on his scalp. The bags under his eyes looked worse than they actually were due to his pale skin. His torso was covered in scars, bruises, cuts, and gashes - most over a day old by now.

The blood oozing from his most recent damage was enough to bring his attention to it. It had stopped bleeding at some point while he was still with Patton, but all of the activity and running he had done since had reopened it a little. He hoped it wouldn’t do much more than scar when it healed.

“Hey, are you done in there?” Logan asked with a gentle knock. Anxiety let out a hum before walking over to the door and opening it. He turned the lights off before letting Logan take him over to Thomas and Roman.

“Are you ready to patch yourself back up?” Thomas asked.

Before Anxiety could answer, Logan said, “I think it would be best if we helped. You are probably exhausted and susceptible to error.”

Anxiety gave Logan a confused expression.

“What Calculator Watch is trying to say is that we want to help you,” Roman sighed. “It’s a bad wound and if you mess up, you’ll only make it worse.”

Anxiety bit his lip, weighing the pros and cons. He knew it would hurt either way and he really just wanted to give into some form of care. With hesitance, he nodded. Logan gave him a small smile before directing him to lay on the couch. Roman laid the already bloody shirt on the couch before Thomas helped Anxiety lay down.

“I’m going to start by cleaning it,” Logan said. Anxiety knew that this was going to be a long process.

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It was a couple of hours before it was over. Anxiety was constantly gritting his teeth, not letting any noise slip out - *might get punished, might get punished, punished punishedpunished* .

The whole time, Thomas let Anxiety hold his hand while Roman ran a hand through Anxiety’s short hair, both whispering reassurances, and praises. Even Logan was trying to make an effort to comfort Anxiety by telling him how well he was doing.

Anxiety was left panting after the whole ordeal was over, completely spent. He felt somebody help him sit up and another person helped him put on the shirt Thomas gave him.

“Hey, we need to move you from the couch,” Thomas whispered. “Can we do that?”

Anxiety let out a half-hearted groan before feeling three sets of hands move him to another location. This place was soft and cold - but a nice cold, like a tile floor after you’ve been exercising for a while. Anxiety let out a soft sigh as he head gently hit the mass of soft.



"Thomas, Logan and I are going to head out," Roman's voice said. "See you at school tomorrow."

Anxiety filtered out the talking and other sounds, instead focusing on getting his jacket over to him. After a moment, he was left panting. Still didn't have enough energy. He had expended too much while staying with Patton and keeping him safe.

"Jacket," Anxiety said softly after Roman and Logan left. "Want jacket."

"Okay, I'll get you your jacket," Thomas replied. He stood and left, but was back a moment later. He draped the jacket over Anxiety's body. His gaze was drawn to the black ink on Anxiety's arm. "What's that?"

"M'name," Anxiety responded, voice sleepy. "AX mean Anxiety, 01 is first. VI is not needed."

"So your name is Anxiety?" Thomas asked. Anxiety nodded. "Then do you mind if I call you Anx for short?"

Anxiety let out an approving hum as Thomas started petting his head, gentle but firm. Just as he was about to drift into sleep, he muttered, "G'night, Thomas."

"Night, Anx."

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"Okay, mom, breakfast is ready," Kai said, putting two plates on the table.

"Careful of the poster," Callie said, moving some papers around on the table. "I can't eat."

"Mom, I need you to eat," Kai said, sitting down.

"Listen," Callie said, sniffing. "The Xerox place opens in, like, thirty minutes."

"Yeah," Kai nodded.

"And I really don't want you going alone," Callie continued.

"I know. I got it," Kai said.

"So I'm gonna have Karen take you because I should be here," Callie said.

"Alright, okay," Kai said, not going to fight his mom on this.

"I need you to make 200, 300 copies. How much is a copy?"

"Ten cents," Kai said. "Mom, mom."

"Okay, ten cents. If we—"

"Mom. Mom! Mom, I need you to listen to me," Kai said, grabbing one of Callie's hands. "Calm down. Don't worry about it. If you get stressed, it'll only make it worse. I have it covered, don't worry."

"I'm sorry," Callie sighed, looking up at Kai.

"No, don't be."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Kai told her.

"I—" Callie was cut off by knocking at the door. She quickly stood from her chair and basically ran over to the door. She opened it to reveal Karter. "We've been waiting six hours!"

"I know, I came as soon as I could," Karter sighed, pushing the door open further. There were bags under his eyes. It was obvious he hadn't slept in a while. He stepped inside before closing the door.

"Six hours!"

"Can I get a little bit of trust here?" Karter asked. "We searched all night, and still are. Went all the way to Townsville."

"And?"

"Nothing," Karter said bluntly.

"No," Callie whispered, voice cracking. She covered her hand with her mouth and walked over to Kai, who had entered the living room during the conversation.

"Sasha said you got a phone call," Karter said softly.

"Yeah," Callie said, taking her hand from her mouth. She walked over to the phone and Karter followed her. She sniffed, holding back tears.

Karter walked up to the phone and inspected it. It was black like it was burnt, but not melted. Meaning, it was probably fried.

"Storm fried it pretty good, huh?" Karter said, taking the phone off of its stand.

"The storm?!" Callie exclaimed.

"Yeah, what else?" Karter said, looking at Callie. "It's a little bit strange, but the only other possible explanation is faulty wiring."

"Can't we trace who made the call?" Kai asked. "Contact the-"

"Don't really work like that," Karter said. "Wish it did, but it doesn't. Now, are you sure it was Patton?"

"Yes! I literally heard his voice!" Callie said. "He was with another kid - a kid who was his friend. I didn't recognize the voice, but Patton didn't tell me his name. The kid was protecting him from... something. Neither knew where they were - or at least, that's what Patton told me. Before I could ask any questions, the line cut off."

"That's not enough information to find where they are," Karter said. "As much as I hate it, we have no leads, and now there's another kid missing. Then again, it could have been a prank call."

"Who would do that?!" Kai asked.

"Who knows," Karter said, shaking his head. "It's been on TV. Brings out all the crazies. False leads, prank calls."

"No, it was him," Callie said. "Are you telling me that I don't know

my own child's voice?"

"That's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying that your judgment is being overshadowed by your emotion," Karter said.

"What happened to having some trust between us?" Callie asked. "Wouldn't you know your own child's voice?!"

Karter sighed. Callie looked away in regret. Karter took a few steps back, taking a deep breath.

"You heard from Ishmael yet?" Karter asked.

"No," Callie said.

"It's been long enough, I'm having him checked out," Karter said, leaving the house. Callie watched him leave.

"I'm gonna go talk to him," Kai said. He ran out the door. Callie walked over to the couch and sat down. A minute later, Kai came back inside, looking a little bit disappointed.

Without a word, Kai joined Callie on the couch. He pulled her into a hug as she started crying. He hushed her softly.

"It's okay. We'll find him. I promise we will."

## 6. Trials and Tribulations

“When alpha particles pass through gold foil they become what?” Adlyn said, walking down the hallway with Leilani.

“Unoccupied space.”

“A molecule that can-” Adlyn started, but Miguel walked up and took the stack of cards from her hands. “Hey!”

“I’m pretty sure you’ve studied enough, Lani,” Miguel said.

Leilani sighed. “Miguel.”

“I’m telling you, you got this,” Miguel said. “Don’t worry. Now, on to more important matters. My mom and dad are out of town on a conference call for my dad’s work. I’m throwing a party at my place. You in?”

“Why would I do that? It’s Tuesday,” Leilani said.

“It’s Tuesday!” Lakin mocked. “My God.” Lakin and Shaun started laughing, but not very loud.

“Come on, it’ll be lowkey, just us,” Miguel said. “It’ll be fun! What do you say? You in or out?”

“I...” Leilani started.

Shaun scoffed, looking behind Leilani and Adlyn. “Oh god, look.”

Leilani and Adlyn turned around. Standing at the bulletin board was Kai Sanchez. He had the reputation of a delinquent. Those older than him ignored him and those younger than him were scared of him. However, people in the same grade despised him, though he was a person to be bullied and hated. Leilani didn’t know why seeing as he hadn’t really done much to anyone.

“Oh wow, that’s depressing,” Miguel said, watching Kai put up missing person posters for Patton. Leilani’s heart clenched in her chest, thoughts going back to Thomas’ outburst from the night

before.

“Should we say something?”

“I don’t think he speaks,” Shaun said.

“How much do you want to bet he killed the kid?” Lakin said, smirking.

“Shut up,” Miguel said.

Leilani looked Kai up and down. His light hair was a mess, he was paler than before, he looked like he had started to eat less, and it seemed as if he had yet to sleep since Patton had gone missing.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, Leilani walked over to him. “Um, hey.”

Kai was hesitant with his response. “Hi.”

“I just- I wanted to say that, um... I’m sorry. About everything,” Leilani said. “Last night, Thomas got upset at me about how much Patton does for his friends. I suppose it was my fault for saying something I shouldn’t have. But yeah... I’m sorry.”

Kai’s gaze drifted over to the four people Leilani had left. Leilani looked over her shoulder, then back to him.

“Everyone’s thinking about you,” Leilani said. Kai half-glared at her. “It sucks.”

“Yeah. You wouldn’t know that, though, would you?” Kai said, voice bitter. Leilani ignored the implications behind his words.

“I’m sure he’s fine,” she continued. “He’s a smart kid, despite his... lack of understanding.”

“Are you just gonna keep patronizing me?” Kai said, sighing. He sounded defeated. “Because I *really* need to get back to my mom.

Leilani opened her mouth to reply, but the bell rang. She settled on, “I have to go. I have a chemistry test.”

“Sure,” Kai said. Leilani turned around and started to leave as Kai picked up his bag. “Oh, and Sanders?”

Leilani turned around. “Yeah?”

“Try not to upset your brother too much,” Kai said. “You never realize how much you love him until he’s gone.”

“Yeah, okay,” Leilani nodded, then continued on her way to her class.

Kai ignored the overhead announcement from the office as he left the school. He didn’t want this pity, his mom didn’t need it. What he wanted was to find Patton. What his mom needed was some help. And Kai was determined to find the kid who was with Patton from the phone call the night before.

-----

“You want anything to drink?” Thomas asked. “We have orange juice, milk, um... water?”

Anxiety wasn’t really listening to him. Instead, he was inspecting the TV. It was off. Anxiety basically ignored Thomas as he talked about the TV. Anxiety knew what it was - it was a flat 1920x1080. *TVs were also called flat plasma display panels, or PDPs. The very first made was in 1964, by Donald Bitzer, Gene Slato, and Robert Willson.*

Anxiety mentally shook the thought from his head. It wasn’t time for that. He really hated the little chip in his head that supplied him with any and all random facts. It got annoying.

Anxiety wandered over to the fireplace and looked at the pictures on the mantle. He reached up and ran his fingers over a picture of a teenage girl. A vision filled his head.

*A boy sneaking into her room late at night. Studying for a bit before the boy wanted things to become more interesting. The boy pushing himself over the girl and kissing her. The girl quickly pushing him off and continuing to study.*

Anxiety took in a sharp breath. He turned to Thomas. “What is ‘kissing’?”

Thomas' face turned red. "Well, it's something you do with someone you care about deeply. It can be between siblings, friends, lovers, and so on."

Anxiety hummed, turning back to the picture. He didn't make a comment on the vision, nor did he say anything about the picture. He simply withdrew his hand and looked at the picture of the little human - *baby*. Anxiety pointed and looked at Thomas.

"That's Shae, he's my little brother. He's two, turning three next week," Thomas said. "Next to his picture is a picture of my parents. My dad is named Kenneth and my mom's name is Lilia. Say, do you have parents? I know you told me that bad people are after you but did you ever meet your parents?"

Anxiety shrugged. He honestly didn't know. If he did, whether they were even alive or not wasn't his business.

***Neither is being here. You should just leave. Thomas doesn't want to have to take care of you. He has better things to do.***

Anxiety ignored the voice that he had grown used to. Instead, he continued around the room, stopping at a chair. It looked like it had a lot of padding and seemed comfortable.

"That's our Lay-Z-Boy," Thomas said. "My dad always falls asleep there. You can sit in it if you want."

Anxiety walked around to the front of the chair and slowly seated himself in it, half-cringing at the pain still in his side. Thomas said he didn't have any painkillers.

Thomas knelt down next to the chair. The next thing Anxiety knew the chair was leaning back and his feet had a resting spot. His heart had jumped into his throat, but once he realized he was safe, he let out a little laugh.

"See, it's okay," Thomas said, laughing a little too. He sat the chair back up. "Now you try."

Anxiety reached over the side. His hand hit something plastic and he grabbed it. Then he pulled. He was sent back into the position that



resembled laying down. Both of them laughed again.

-----

Patton's frame shook violently from inside the chest. He was scared, terrified. He missed the company of Anxiety. He wanted him here.

Patton faintly heard *Counting Stars* playing from somewhere near him. The clicking and growling of the Demogorgon were also there. However, with the playing of the song, the feeling of Kai being there with him came to him.

*"Lately, I've been, I've been losin' sleep. Dreamin' about the things that we could be,"* the song played. *"But baby, I've been, I've been prayin' hard. Said no more countin' dollars, we'll be countin' stars. Yeah, we'll be countin' stars."*

*Patton and Kai started bobbing their heads as the beat started up. Patton had a grin on his face and was almost tempted to start dancing around his room.*

*"You like it?" Kai asked, smiling as well.*

*"Yeah!" Patton exclaimed. "It makes me wanna dance!"*

*"Feel free to keep the mix if you want," Kai said.*

*"Really?!" Patton said.*

*"Yeah, really," Kai smiled. "All the stuff you like is on here. We got some of the classics, some instrumentals I made, stuff from musicals, some stuff we've made together, and all of the popular songs you're into. You're gonna love it."*

*"Definitely! Especially since you made it," Patton said. His smile fell as he heard their mom shouting from the other room.*

*"Where the hell are you, Ishmael?! I don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear it!"*

*From there her yelling got indistinct as Patton felt himself falling into a moment of panic. Kai stood from the bed and went to close the door. Once*

*he did that, he came and sat back on the bed.*

*“ I see this life like a swinging vine, swing my heart across the line ,” the song was singing. Kai lowered the volume.*

*“He’s not coming, is he?” Patton asked voice disappointed. Kai sighed through his nose.*

*“ Do you even like sports?”*

*“No... but... it’s fun to go sometimes,” Patton said weakly, shrugging one shoulder.*

*“Come on , Patton. Has he ever done anything with you that you actually enjoy ?” Kai asked. “You know, like video games, or cooking, or anything at all?”*

*“I dunno,” Patton said, wanting to give his father the benefit of the doubt.*

*“No, he hasn’t. He doesn’t care ,” Kai said firmly. There was something else there, too, but Patton could identify it. “He’s trying to force you to like normal things. You shouldn’t like things because people tell you to, okay? Especially him .” Kai chuckled humorlessly. “I learned that the hard way.”*

*After a moment, Patton nodded. Kai’s smile - genuine smile - came back.*

*“But you like OneRepublic? For real?”*

*“For real,” Patton said, smiling too. “Definitely.”*

*“ Take that money and watch it burn, sink in the river the lessons I learned. ”*

The last words of the songs almost seemed to echo in Patton’s head. He bit his lip as tears ran down his cheeks. He was scared. He wanted *someone* to be here with him. Instead, he’s just stuck with a monster. He was tempted to leave his hiding spot and just let the monster get him. But he couldn’t do that to his friends, to his mom, to Anxiety. He had to stay alive. He *had* to.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

I literally researched TV and flat screens for this chapter. You're welcome.

[Here](#) is the song, which I very obviously do not own.

## 7. Reunited and Pulled Apart

### Summary for the Chapter:

#### Chapter Warnings- Anxiety, anxiety attack, worry

Callie heaved a sigh as she opened the door to the store. She immediately went to the phone section, dodging the questions from her boss. When she got up to the counter, the price was \$22.56.

“I gave all my money to Kai this morning,” Callie said. “He needed to make copies for the posters. Take it out of my next paycheck. I also need two weeks of leave.”

“Of course,” her boss sighed, getting out a book and writing it down. “But you do realize I have to pay Henry for covering you, correct?”

“Michael, I’ve been working here ten years. I have never *once* taken a break or day off work. I’ve worked on Christmas Eve, and on Thanksgiving. I’ve even worked on both of my sons’ birthdays at *least* once. Just give me two weeks of paid leave. That’s all I ask.”

Michael looked down in thought.

“Just- My kid is missing. I don’t know where he is, I don’t know if he’s okay,” Callie said, voice surprisingly calm. “I don’t know if I’ll ever see him again or if he’s hurt. All I know is that I need this phone, and two weeks of leave. And a pack of menthols.”

Michael nodded. Once the transaction was complete, Callie left the shop and went home. When she got there, she immediately got the phone out and plugged it in. She pulled a chair over to the phone, sat down, and set the phone in her lap. She wouldn’t miss another call from Patton.

-----

“These are all my action figures,” Thomas said. “That’s Batman, and that’s Superman, and that’s Spider-Man. There are Wonder Woman and Supergirl.”

Anxiety hummed, the chip in his head informing him about all of the superheroes named. He was a little curious about why people would find it entertaining, but he supposed that different people liked different things.

After a moment, Anxiety walked over to the shelf with a bunch of trophies on it. He looked at them and saw that they all had different years, but not the current year. Anxiety looked over to Thomas as the latter walked over.

“Those are from the science fair,” Thomas said. “We’ve won every year. Except for last year. We got third then. Roman is the one who comes up with the subject or idea, Logan does most of the research, I gather the materials, and Patton supports us in everything we do. When the atmosphere got tense, Patton would take one of us away to talk with us. He’d do that for each of us. I really miss him.”

Anxiety saw a photo with the four - Logan, Thomas, Roman, and Patton - holding a trophy. He pointed at Patton, then looked to Thomas. He opened his mouth to speak before he heard a sound outside. Thomas’ mom had come back from her errands.

“Crud!” Thomas exclaimed, bolting to the window and looking out. “My mom is back. We have to get you back to the basement.”

Thomas ran back over to Anxiety and took his hand, then rushed both of them out into the hallway and down the stairs. They got halfway down before Thomas’ mom opened the door, Shae in her arms.

“I bought pizza and macaroni. Lasagna, too,” Lilia was saying.

“Okay,” Shae said, nodding.

“Okay,” Lilia said back as she closed the door. Thomas quickly turned around and ushered Anxiety back up the stairs. They reached the top stair when they heard Lilia call out, “Kenneth? Are you home?”

“Just me, mom!” Thomas yelled back, running to get Anxiety safely hidden in his room.

“Thomas? What are you doing home?!”

“Just one second!” Thomas quickly pulled Anxiety into his room, then pulled the confused boy to the closet. He opened the closet then turned to Anxiety. “In here. I’ll be right back okay?”

Anxiety bit his lip anxiously, looking at the dark space and Thomas. With more hesitance than he would enjoy, he stepped into the closet. He heard Thomas’ mother call again. Thomas went to close the door, but Anxiety stopped it from closing just before it latched shut.

“Promise?” Anxiety asked, voice full of fear.

“I promise. I’ll be back,” Thomas replied and closed the door. Anxiety was reminded of the promise he made to Patton just the other day. Anxiety let he leaned back on the wall as a panic rose over him. He heard Thomas walk away, saying something, but couldn’t really process what it was.

Anxiety felt his breathing become shallow, his heart rate picking up. He slowly let himself sink into a sitting position. The chip started filling his head with terrible thoughts that he couldn’t push away. His eyes fluttered shut and he found himself lost in a memory.

*“No!” A younger Anxiety’s voice rang out, echoing in the vacant hallways. He struggled against his captors who were carrying a foot off the ground. “No! Let go! Papa, save me! Help me! Please!”*

*Tears ran down Anxiety’s face as he writhed in the people’s grasps. He let out several sobs, trying to wrench himself away. They were too strong for him, he knew - they always kept him unfed to keep his strength to a minimum. This fact didn’t stop him from trying, though.*

*“Papa! No want!” Anxiety sobbed, pulling against the men holding him. He looked over his shoulder at the man who he called ‘Papa,’ a pleading look in his eyes. “Stop! Please! Papa! Papa!” His voice was still echoing as they turned a corner. “No! No, no, no! No! Stop! Stop it! Please, no!” He let out a scream of anger and anguish as he was tossed to the floor of a small room. He quickly scrambled to his knees. “I promise, I be good! Please, I promise!”*

*Anxiety crawled over to the now-closed door and started banging on it. “Please! Promise! I promise! Papa, please! No! Papa!”*

Anxiety buried his face in his knees, tears slipping down his cheeks. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself in the Sanchez's house. He felt Patton's presence, but couldn't focus on it - he was too busy having another... *episode* .

Soon, though, he was able to calm down - 4, 7, 8, he repeated in his head - and he looked around. He wasn't in the same room as Patton, but the monster was right next to him. He slapped a hand over his own mouth to keep himself quiet. So far, the Demogorgon could only smell him, as far as he knew.

Anxiety heard some sniffing from another room that also attracted the Demogorgon's attention. He took his hand away from his mouth and with a shaky voice, he called out.

"Hey!"

The Demogorgon's head snapped over to him and it got closer. He held his breath, not moving. A moment later, the Demogorgon - apparently - found something more interesting in the normal world. When the monster disappeared - through the wall - Anxiety let out the breath he had been holding. He panted for a moment before remembering Patton in the other room.

Anxiety quickly clambered to his feet. He then shot out of the room and ran to a bedroom - Patton's, by the look of it. He ignored all the roots and tore off the ones that had grown over a chest. He opened the chest and felt relieved at the bright blue shirt he found.

"Patton," he said softly. Patton's head quickly flew up, tear-stained face brightening at the sight of Anxiety.

"Anx, you're back!" Patton exclaimed, throwing himself at Anxiety. Anxiety stumbled a bit with the sudden weight, forgetting to flinch from the sudden contact.

"Yeah," Anxiety said, slowly wrapping an arm around Patton and petting his head with the other. "Monster gone. Safe now."

Patton let out a breath of relief. "I thought it would never leave. Were you able to find my friends?"

Anxiety nodded. "Thomas, Roman, Logan. They help me find you." He put a hand on the stitched-up gash. "Help me with hurt."

"Good," Patton said, pulling away. "When do you think they can get to me?"

Anxiety shook his head. He didn't know. Maybe he could-

"What the hell?!"

Anxiety's head snapped to his left as he felt a hand on him. His eyes widened as he saw Thomas appear in the void. Patton's attention was drawn, too. Anxiety had a feeling that Patton would've cried if he could.

"Thomas!" Patton said. Thomas looked over and tears formed in his eyes.

"Patton!" Thomas tried to move and hug Patton but was stopped by Anxiety.

"Why you here?!" Anxiety demanded. He got a bout of dizziness and stumbled slightly. He put a hand up to his head with a groan.

"I was trying to get you out of a weird trance you were in, then I just appeared here," Thomas said.

"Anxiety, are you alright?" Patton asked, bracing Anxiety.

"Not enough power," Anxiety said, leaning against the slightly taller boy. "Too much usage."

"Woah, he's not looking too good," Thomas said, putting a hand on Anxiety's forehead. "He looks like he's about to pass out any moment."

"It takes too much of his energy to be here, let alone bring someone else along," Patton said. He looked up at Thomas, a sort of longing in his eyes. "I'm scared Thomas. It's cold here, and I'm alone with a monster."

"What kind of monster?" Thomas asked.



“Not ‘nuff time,” Anxiety muttered, out of breath. He felt a bead of sweat roll down his face as a pain squeezed his chest. “‘Splain later.”

Thomas felt himself fade from that plane of existence. He looked at Patton, almost scared they would never see each other again.

“Let’s just say ‘it got me’,” Patton said.

Thomas was suddenly back in his closet with an exhausted Anxiety. Thomas pushed away his despair about leaving Patton behind. Instead, he let himself be concerned for Anxiety’s well-being.

“Let me help you,” Thomas said, pushing Anxiety’s sweaty hair from his face. He lifted Anxiety into his arms, then moved him to the bed.

As Thomas took care of Anxiety, he couldn’t help but think, *how can I get back to Patton?*

## 8. Visit to Dad

### Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter warnings - shady character, bad implications, canon alteration

Kai parked his car after locating which house was his father's. He turned the car off, then pushed down his dread. He *had* to do this. For his mom - and for Patton. He swallowed the lump in his throat as he exited the car and grabbed his duffel bag.

Kai slammed the door closed and walked across the street, fidgeting with his fingerless gloves. He ignored the rain, and instead surveyed his dad's house. It wasn't anything special - in fact, the yard was a bit of a mess. Unkempt, dirty, trash everywhere - Kai's mom would have his hide if she saw this.

Kai walked up the steps and peered through the door window. The inside was just as bad as the outside, maybe worse. There was some muffled music playing from the TV - sounded like a marching band or something.

Without any hesitance, Kai pounded on the door. "Hello?!" After receiving no answer for a few moments, he slammed his hand on the door again.

A short, lithe, red-headed male walked into the living room from the kitchen and opened the door. When he spoke, his voice was high pitched. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah, is Ishmael around?" Kai asked, fighting to keep his voice level.

"He's out back, what do you want?" The man looked to be fresh out of high school. Disgusting, honestly.

Kai slipped past him. "To look around."

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Won't take too long," Kai said, navigating through the slightly

familiar house.

"I'll call the cops!" The man shouted.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you!" This was a new voice. It had come out of nowhere, scaring Kai to death. Part of that had to do with how they pinned Kai against the wall.

"Get off," Kai said, shoving Ishmael away.

"Okay, I see how it is," Ishmael said, letting a hand linger on Kai's arm. Kai was quick to grab it and throw it at its owner.

"Will someone *please* explain what's going on here?" The kid from before had followed Kai to the hallway.

"Malakai, this is Kevin, my new boyfriend," Ishmael said. "Kevin, this is Malakai, the oldest of my two sons."

Kevin looked between the two before rolling his eyes. "Whatever. I'm in the bathroom if you need me."

Kai glared at Ishmael. "I told you to call Kai. Just Kai."

Ishmael threw an arm around Kai and lowered his voice. "I gave you the name Malakai boy, I'll call you whatever *I* want."

"Get off of me!" Kai said, throwing Ishmael's arm away. He flinched a little before powering on. "I came here to see if Patton had come by your house."

"He's not here," Ishmael said, raising his hands.

"Yeah, I'm not believing that for a second," Kai said, pushing past Ishmael and towards the backyard. He did a thorough search of the entire yard, and of the car sitting in the middle of it.

"Checking up my ass, too?" Ishmael asked, following Kai around. "I'll tell you the same thing I told those damn cops. He's not here and he never has been."

"Why didn't you call my mother back?" Kai said, closing the back of

the car. "She's been worried sick about Patton, and what have you been doing? Sitting here, on your ass - probably getting high and fucking that 18, 19-year-old."

"He's 20, actually," Ishmael said. "And I don't know, I just assumed Callie had forgotten where Patton was. You know, he was lost or something."

"He's not five, he knows his way home," Kai said, raising an eyebrow.

"He was never very good at taking care of himself," Ishmael said.

"This isn't some stupid fucking joke!" Kai said, storming up to Ishmael. "There are search parties, and news reports, and-!"

"Karter's not still chief, is he?" Ishmael said.

"He is," Kai said. "And before you continue that thought, he's a *good* chief. He's trying better than you, at least."

"Listen, boy," Ishmael said, voice deepening. He lowered his head. "I let you into my house, let you talk to my man with disrespect, let you push me away from you - I don't need you to give me any lip."

Kai stiffened, anger immediately dissipating. He looked down, sweat rolling down the back of his neck. This was exactly why he didn't want to come here. He should've stayed home and helped his mom look for Patton there.

"Look, I love you, you know that," Ishmael said, voice softening. "I want you to tell your mother to leave the hellhole - as soon as you find Patton. Come out here to the city, people are more real here. Besides, then I could see my boys more."

Kai kept his jaw clamped shut, not moving at all.

"You don't think I want to see you more?" Ishmael asked.

"It's not that, it's just..." Kai started, then continued in his head, *I don't want to see you.*

"You'd better head out, Malakai," Ishmael said. "Don't want to worry

your mother more than you already have.”

Kai started to head out, then hesitated. He pulled a picture of Patton from his bag and pushed it into Ishmael’s hands. He continued on his way without another word.

---

Anxiety watched Roman close the door slowly. Both he and Logan had been debriefed by Thomas on what had happened. Anxiety was still recovering his energy, so he was propped up on Thomas’ bed with pillows. A glass of water was on the nightstand.

“So I see you kept him here,” Logan said, observing Anxiety.

“Are you out of your mind?” Roman asked, massaging his temples.

“He knows about Patton,” Thomas said. “He showed me. He can’t really do it right now, because he used up a lot of energy. However, he explained to me - as well as he can, anyway - that sometimes, when he’s in a state of panic, his powers go haywire. He ends up in another world, which is where Patton is.”

“This is a little convenient, don’t you think?” Roman asked.

“I mean, a little, but he can help us!” Thomas exclaimed.

“Maybe Thomas has a point,” Logan said.

“So you’re siding with him?” Roman asked.

“I’m simply stating that we have a lead and the adults don’t,” Logan said. “If the adults found out about him, they would probably try to tell the authorities. Obviously, once the authorities are told, whoever had him before would come after him.”

“No telling bad people,” Anxiety said, shaking his head.

“We won’t, don’t worry,” Thomas said.

“I suppose you and Specs have a point,” Roman sighed. “But we still

don't have a means of getting to Patton physically."

"That is true," Logan said, walking over to the bed and sitting down. "Anxiety, do you have any ideas?"

Anxiety immediately thought of the facility where he came from, but he wouldn't take them there - never. Instead, he shook his head. "No energy, no astral projection."

"Wait, so he knows what astral projection means, but not how to form proper sentences?" Roman asked.

"Obviously, the people who had him before taught him very specific things," Logan said.

"So to go over some ground rules: no telling the adults or authorities, no continuous or repetitive trips to the other world, and no going off on our own," Thomas said, counting on his fingers.

"Agreed," Logan said.

"I second that," Roman stated.

Anxiety simply nodded.

---

Joe paced around his living room, glancing at the time. It was getting near 3 PM. Thankfully, the restaurant was closed as it was a Sunday. Though, that just meant Joe had nothing to busy his mind. It left him driving himself up the wall worrying about Anxiety.

A knock at his door pulled his attention away. It caught him off-guard as he wasn't expecting any guests.

Either way, Joe walked over and opened the door. Standing there were some official-looking people. A man and a woman, flanked by a couple bodyguards.

"May I help you?" Joe asked.

"Yes, I'm Mary Abbott and this is Nicholas Bicanni, with Child Protective Services," the woman said, flashing her badge. "I'm here

on a report of one of your neighbors seeing a child in the area. Do you mind if we take a look around?"

Joe was slightly suspicious but allowed them in any way. He hovered around them as they searched through his house. He was grateful he had managed to clean up everything Anxiety had left behind, just in case these people *weren't* who they said they were.

"Well, everything seems in order," Nicholas said, coming back to Joe's living room.

"I gave you my number a little while ago, so if you have any other concerns, don't be afraid to call me," Joe said.

"Of course," Mary said with a stiff smile.

Joe kept his expression polite and guided the group of people to the door. "It's been lovely meeting you."

"And you as well, Mr. Sandler," Nicholas said.

Joe waved them off, letting out a sigh of relief as he locked his door. Crisis averted.

For now.

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Anxiety listened to Thomas' older sister through the wall. It was a bit muffled, but he understood most of it. Names flitted through Anxiety's mind as a vision filled his head.

*A teen boy - Miguel - was talking. "...Now, on to more important matters. My mom and dad are out of town with a conference call for my dad's work. I'm throwing a party at my place. You in?"*

*"Why would I do that? It's Tuesday," Leilani said.*

*"It's Tuesday!" Lakin mocked. "My god." Lakin and Shaun started laughing, but not very loud.*

*"Come on, it'll be lowkey, just us," Miguel said. "It'll be fun! What do you say? You in or out?"*

*“I...” Leilani started.*

The vision slipped away, leaving Anxiety with the information that Leilani was planning on going out with those friends, and maybe another. It worried him. The Demogorgon hadn't eaten in awhile, since Anxiety had been able to keep Patton safe, so one of these people, if left alone, were going to be taken.

“Leilani, dinner!” That was Thomas' mom - Lilia.

“Coming!” Leilani called.

Anxiety weighed his options as he listened to Leilani hang up and run downstairs. He considered going out the window, but he didn't really trust himself to climb to the ground yet. With a nod, he made his decision.

After grabbing Thomas' walkie talkie, Anxiety carefully left the bedroom, glancing around the hallway. With practiced skill, he silently moved to the stairs. Earlier, he had been able to tell which stairs creaked, so he avoided those.

Leilani was talking to her mom about an “assembly for Patton” at the school. Lilia said she could go, and Anxiety took that as his cue.

Sending a slight glare at Thomas, Logan, and Roman, Anxiety showed the walkie talkie. He silently moved across the floorboards and to the backdoor, which he opened, slipped through, and closed, just as quietly.

Anxiety hoped he was able to make it in time.